

Infrastructure, the Environment & Society

**Assessments to Connect, Power, House, & Protect for a
Sustainable Future in an Uncertain Geopolitical & Natural World**

2025 Conference Preliminary Program

November 4th & 5th, 2025

Ontario Bar Association – 20 Toronto Street, 2nd Floor

Virtual Options Available



OVERVIEW:

Environmental Assessment (EA) and Impact Assessment (IA) practitioners are at the cornerstone of a major societal and environmental transition to address innumerable existential crises, where transformational change is needed to address challenges, be it climate change, loss of biodiversity, housing shortages, the more prolific use of and demand for electricity, or even trade relationships. This year's conference theme recognizes the key role transformative infrastructure will play during uncertainty in the geopolitical, societal and natural world. Infrastructure enables trade, powers businesses, connects workers to their jobs, creates opportunities for communities and protects the nation and its citizens from an increasingly unpredictable natural environment. This conference is about stimulating a meaningful dialogue about supporting development for society's important challenges while leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

Practitioners need to create efficiencies by understanding common problems and standardizing processes while equally isolating complex problems that require innovative solutions. Building the society of the future will mean maximizing outcomes and minimizing impacts on the environment and people. It will mean consulting and cooperating in good faith with Indigenous communities and peoples in order to obtain their free and informed consent prior to the approval of any project affecting their lands or territories and other resources. It will mean learning from past errors that might have negatively impacted health and socio-economic conditions, as well as the biophysical environment. Modern infrastructure projects should create partnership opportunities with Indigenous communities, build communities with vibrant and non-digital human connectivity, and involve early engagement and trusted relationships.

2025 OAIA Conference Planning Committee

- ✓ Violetta Savage: 2025 Conference Chair, City of Toronto
- ✓ Sabrina Wong: 2025 Conference Co-Chair, Dillon
- ✓ Greg McKenzie: Blue Moth Creative
- ✓ Anjala Puvananathan: Impact Assessment Agency of Canada
- ✓ Catherine Gentile: Avaanz
- ✓ Alexia Miljus: GFT
- ✓ Blaire Shoniker: GHD

SPONSORSHIP

The Ontario Association for Impact Assessment (OAIA), a forum for exchanging information and promoting best practice in impact assessment.

OAIA is organizing its annual conference and is now seeking sponsors.

The 2025 conference will take place on November 4th and 5th, 2025 and will be held in-person (and virtually) at the Ontario Bar Association.

Some of the reasons for sponsoring the conference include:

- In recent years the in-person OAIA conference has attracted around 160 participants from every major practitioner of impact assessment.
- Participants come from industry, federal, provincial and municipal governments, Indigenous communities and organizations, and academia. As a sponsor, you can increase your organization's visibility to current and potential clients, partners and stakeholders and network with an audience of impact/environmental assessment professionals.
- Your organization can be associated with other thought and practice leaders in the field of impact assessment, sustainability and corporate social responsibility. Your sponsorship will help demonstrate your commitment to sustainability and corporate social responsibility in the process of impact/environmental assessment.
- Ensure that your organization's information is forefront during the conference.
- Give your staff the opportunity to network with leading practitioners and experts.

Become a sponsor today!

Day 1: November 4, 2025

Day 1 – Day at a Glance

- 8 am to 9 am Registration and light refreshments
- 9 am to 10 am Welcome, Elder Traditional Opening and Land Acknowledgement Discussion
- 10 am to 11 am Opening Panel
- 11 am to 5 pm Session 1 and 2, Concurrent Sessions 3i & 3ii, Sessions 4
- 5 pm Closing Remarks
- 5 pm to 8 pm Networking & Socializing/ Complimentary Appetizers & Cash Bar

Day 1 – Session Details

Opening Panel – Differing perspectives and complex tensions: Considerately furthering societal interests

This opening panel will explore different perspectives on the complex tensions between development and the protection of natural and cultural heritage in the context of today's pressing societal challenges.

Experience has shown that reconciling the goals of environmental protection, economic development, and social equity remains difficult, and at times, deeply contested. Rather than assuming alignment, this panel brings together distinct viewpoints that reflect the diversity of approaches and trade-offs at play. Panelists will consider how Canada's constitutional division of powers, evolving legislative frameworks, and assessment processes shape the possibilities -- and limitations -- of environmental and impact assessment in supporting decisions. The conversation will include attention to Indigenous leadership and participation, the role of assessments in biodiversity conservation, and the pressures posed by growing demands in areas such as energy, housing, and infrastructure. At a time of geopolitical, environmental, and social uncertainty, this discussion aims to provoke thoughtful dialogue about what is at stake in today's development decisions, and how assessment practice might respond.

Panel participants:

- > Justina Ray, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada
- > Michael Fox, Indigenous Community & Engagement
- > Jon Pounder, Stantec Consulting Ltd.
- > Dr. Brian Budd, DPRA Canada

Panel facilitator: Kevin Hanna, University of British Columbia

Session 1: Geospatial routing technology and stronger community outcomes

Creating efficiencies by understanding common problems and standardizing processes while equally isolating complex problems that require innovative solutions.

Session Facilitator (tbc)

Designing and Implementing Involved Assessments to Achieve Stronger Project Outcomes

Jennifer Heneberry and Timm Rochon, DPRA Canada

When aiming to assess and manage socio-economic effects in an era where streamlining assessments is a policy priority, participatory models can support greater transparency and trust building at the outset of project development, which can enhance the legitimacy and quality of decision-making. Traditional predictive approaches tend to overlook important local context and unique features, especially in remote, northern, and Indigenous communities. This presentation will showcase how participatory approaches can be more effective at supporting meaningful engagement, identifying potential impacts and developing more appropriate, community-supported mitigations, adaptive management and monitoring.

Transforming Infrastructure Planning with Advanced Geospatial Routing Technology

Brandon Fox, Dillon Consulting Limited

As infrastructure projects grow in complexity and public scrutiny intensifies, decision-makers are under increasing pressure to deliver plans that are faster, smarter, and more transparent. This presentation introduces a cutting-edge geospatial routing solution that empowers energy, transportation, and environmental planning teams to optimize infrastructure siting. This cloud-based technology leverages real-time geospatial data, customizable constraints, and powerful 3D visualization to analyze thousands of routing alternatives in minutes—significantly reducing manual effort and stakeholder friction. Whether planning power lines, pipelines, or transit corridors, teams can quickly identify technically viable, cost-efficient, and publicly acceptable routes, all while improving cross-departmental collaboration and regulatory alignment.

Session 2: New energy sectors and our communities

At the cornerstone of a major societal and environmental transition, different assessment approaches strive to build societies of the future.

Session Facilitator (tbc)

Diverting Waters: Examining the Potential for Community-Based Strategic Environmental

*Julia Tays, University of Manitoba, **2025 Ontario Impact Assessment Award and Student Bursary Recipient***

This presentation will focus on opportunities for implementing community-based strategic environmental assessment (CBSEA) using the example of micro and mini hydropower (MHP) development in the Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh, India. CBSEA provides an alternative to traditional assessment tools because the process is conducted by community members, ensuring their concerns and local knowledge are considered, while also engaging community members in strategic thinking. CBSEA has been little studied, and this case study presentation will discuss opportunities and barriers for CBSEA in decision-making.

Technical Working Group: A forum for pan-Indigenous collaboration in assessments

Grant Jensen, Larissa Goshulak, and Eve Mcleod Norberg, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada

Optimally prepared technical studies from a proponent are informed by input from participants in the assessment process, including Indigenous communities. To support the proponent to achieve this outcome and to ensure Indigenous collaboration in federal impact assessments, practitioners at the Impact Assessment Agency of Canada formed a technical working group for the Crawford Nickel Project. The technical working group, which included participation from Indigenous communities, government experts and the proponent, enabled improved transparency as well as early and collaborative issue resolution, even prior to the formal submission of effects assessment studies by the proponent to Impact Assessment Agency of Canada.

Bringing REA Back - The Re-invigoration of Renewable Energy Approvals

Lindsay Frith, Stantec Consulting Ltd.

Following the repeal of the *Green Energy Act* and the cancellation of the Feed-in Tariff (FIT) contracts, which encouraged greater use of renewable energy sources, Renewable Energy Approvals (REA) approvals in Ontario have been relatively few and far between. Recently, the Independent Electricity System Operator (IESO) issued a request for proposals and resulted in numerous proponents proposing new wind and solar projects. However, the REA process is now complicated by contemporary IESO requirements, changes and proposed changes in the regulatory landscape, and a reduced familiarity with the REA process by regulators, proponents, and practitioners. This presentation will explore use of desktop tools to determine site suitability which helps rule out sites that will not be viable based on environmental and land use constraints. This presentation will contrast REAs of the past versus now and identify some of the challenges and solutions to manage the IESO expedited procurement timelines and a lengthy approvals process.

Session 3 – Concurrent Sessions

Striving toward Indigenous self-determination: Stimulating meaningful dialogue about supporting development for society’s important challenges while leaving a positive legacy for future generations.

Session 3i: Indigenous-led assessments and artificial intelligence (Interactive)

Session Facilitator (tbc)

Trends in Indigenous-led EA/IA, AI and Indigenous Engagement and Participation Plans

Michael Fox, Indigenous and Community Engagement Inc. (ICE)

The presenters will share insights from projects that they have worked on, including recent trends, challenges and opportunities encountered on projects. The presentation will explore benefits and challenges related to Indigenous-led EA/IA, in using Artificial Intelligence (AI) in EA/IA, and trends related to Indigenous Engagement and Participation in projects including related to hiring, training and bringing on subcontractors/suppliers. This will start with a short presentation and then be an interactive session where practitioners can share their insights on these topics through a facilitated dialogue and interactive online tools.

Session 3ii: Transportation corridors and assessing Aboriginal and/or Treaty Rights

Session Facilitator (tbc)

Indigenous Proponent Perspectives: Assessing Aboriginal and Treaty Rights

Bob Baxter and Lawrence Baxter, Marten Falls First Nation; Jennifer Bruin, J. Bruin Associates Inc.; and Alana Vigna and Andrea Nokleby, Dillon Consulting Inc.

This presentation will focus on Marten Falls First Nation's (MFFN) experience as a proponent of the Marten Falls Community Access Road project in Ontario. The assessment of Aboriginal and/or Treaty Rights and Interests (ATRI) was undertaken while balancing responsibilities as a proponent, cultural sensitivity, and advancing self-determination. The panel will examine the complexities of conducting ATRI assessments as an Indigenous proponent for other Indigenous communities and organizations. The discussion would touch on questions such as “how can Indigenous proponents get comfortable assessing ATRI?” Panelists would share important perspectives on how MFFN's work contributes to shaping a future where Indigenous communities lead in the environmental sector as proponents, while upholding their own ATRI and the ATRI of others.

Session 4: Development, decision-making and the citizen

Building vibrant and non-digital human connectivity requires early engagement and trusted relationships with Indigenous and local communities.

Session Facilitator (tbc)

Collaboration with Indigenous Communities in Health Impact Assessment (HIA)

Lindsay McCallum and Camryn O'Keeffe, WSP Canada Inc.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) emphasize the importance of meaningful engagement with Indigenous communities. Health Impact Assessment (HIA) is a systematic step-by-step process that aims to identify impacts of proposed actions on community health. Involving Indigenous communities at each of step of this process enables practitioners to use culturally appropriate methodologies and facilitates meaningful collaboration. This presentation will review examples of Indigenous engagement throughout the HIA process in practice and discuss the challenges, opportunities, and how Indigenous collaboration approaches can lead to more equitable and effective outcomes for Indigenous communities.

Efficiency for whom? GBA+ and the energy transition

Mackenzie Zacharias and Patricia Fitzpatrick, The University of Winnipeg

Intersectional analysis is under-utilized across Canada. In the context of regulatory efficiency and the push for rapid development, this presentation showcases preliminary findings of a project designed to understand if, and how, legislative and policy developments, particularly related to mining and energy, align with principles and practices to make development processes accessibility, including access for queer, LGBTQ2S+, and disabled peoples. Findings are based on a robust review of literature and preliminary survey and workshop data from the International Association of Impact Assessment (IAIA) 2025 Conference. The presentation will explore barriers to including gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) in assessment decision-making processes.

Omushkegowii Askiwii Manichedowin (conserving mushkegowuk lands)

Tyson Wesley, Kashechewa First Nation; and Vanessa Rowena Gloria (Macumber) Genier, Quilts for Survivors, Missanabie Cree First Nation

At the 2024 OAIA Conference, Omushkegowii Askiwii Manichedowin, a project to conserve mushkegowuk lands, was presented at its initial stages. One year on, the 2025 presentation will focus the work of a formal working group to engage community members, including elders, in a community led, council supported, process. For 2025/2026, the working group would prioritize work in communities, emphasizing shared values and participation of elders, so as to implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) calls to action, and follow the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP). The overall objective of the work is to create a resource toolkit and community led and housed impact assessment course. The expected outcome would be informed decision-making and meaningful participation for community specific project assessments; as well as capacity to build partnerships and lead assessments in the future.

Day 2: November 5, 2025

Day 2 – Day at a Glance

- 8:30 am to 9 am Registration and light refreshments
- 9 am to 9:10 am Welcome
- 9:10 am to 3:20 am Session 5, 6, 7 and 8
- 3:20 pm to 3:50 pm Closing Panel
- 3:50 pm to 4 pm Closing Remarks from the President
- 4 pm to 4:15 pm Elder Traditional Closing

Day 2 – Session Details

Session 5: Opportunities and challenges with legislative reforms

Various jurisdictions have enacted laws that modernize aspects of their respective legislative regimes.

Session Facilitator (tbc)

Environmental Assessment Modernization in Ontario

TBC, Ontario Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks

Ontario has been transforming its environmental assessment (EA) program to better serve the province's environment, economy and communities. This presentation, delivered by the EA Modernization Branch from the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP), will highlight key EA modernization initiatives, including ones that have been successfully implemented and others that are currently underway. Ontario aims to deliver faster, simpler, smarter EAs by making practical changes that maintain environmental oversight while reducing duplication, improving clarity and minimizing project delays.

Integrating EA and Permitting: Legislative Trends in Ontario and British Columbia

Shannon McNeill, GHD

This presentation will offer a comparative analysis of legislative and regulatory approaches to environmental assessment (EA) and permitting integration in Ontario and British Columbia, with a focus on recent developments affecting infrastructure and energy projects. In Ontario, evolving policy directions aim to streamline approval processes, reduce administrative duplication, and accelerate project timelines. Meanwhile, British Columbia continues to refine its “one-window” regulatory model, which seeks to harmonize EA and permitting while maintaining environmental safeguards. This presentation will examine whether a balanced approach to environmental assessment and permitting integration is achievable in Ontario and British Columbia. It will explore how legislative changes, institutional coordination, and procedural reforms can influence the ability to support timely infrastructure development while safeguarding ecological and social values. By analyzing the integration of environmental assessment and permitting in Ontario and BC, the session will aim to identify best practices and cautionary lessons for policymakers, regulators, and stakeholders navigating the complex intersection of development and environmental protection.

Ontario's Mining Regime undermines Indigenous Rights and Environmental Protection

Constance O'Connor, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada; and Laura Tanguay, Postdoctoral Fellow, Harvard University

Ontario's free-entry mining system allows prospectors to stake mineral claims on Indigenous territories with minimal oversight and no prior consultation. Once staked, these claims grant exclusive exploration rights—often in ways that physically disturb culturally and ecologically significant areas. The duty to consult First Nations is triggered only when prospectors apply for a mineral exploration permit. This presentation will highlight, as illustrated in the Mineral Tracker developed by Wildlife Conservation Society Canada, challenges with these practices in high-activity regions like the Ring of Fire due to the volume of exploration notifications requiring review by Indigenous communities the implications to continued traditional uses and cultural practices.

How Natural Resources Canada tools and expertise support major project assessments

Christina Clarke, Natural Resources Canada

Natural Resources Canada (NRCan) is supporting the federal government's on-going efforts to improve the coordination of impact assessments across jurisdictions to streamline assessments, under the principle of one project, one assessment. To assist project-level reviews, NRCan has a wide array of multidisciplinary expertise and tools, including but not limited to:

- Open Science and Data Platform, a hub providing access to Federal/Provincial/Territorial government data, science and regulatory information
- Technical and scientific advice-based on the department's diverse, scientific research mandate (e.g., mine waste characterization and management, groundwater and hydrogeology, economic and competitiveness analysis, etc.)
- Baseline data and research (e.g., earth observations and analysis of geochemistry reviews)
- Proponent engagement (e.g., Mining Application Navigator)
- With new legislation and shortened timelines, NRCan's expertise and tools are well-positioned to help government adapt to expedited processes.

Session 6: Direct involvement of Indigenous communities in project planning

Building the society of the future will mean consulting and cooperating in good faith with Indigenous communities and peoples.

Session Facilitator: *Elise Croll, Arup*

Effective Approaches to Indigenous Engagement and Participation in Infrastructure Projects– Alexandra Bridge Replacement Project – Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC) Proponent, National Capital Commission (Partner) and Consulting Technical Advisor

Panelists

Elise Croll, Arup; Kevin Coulter, Dillon Consulting; Rebecca Sciarra and Rob MacDonald, ASI; Victoria Angel, ERA; Ray Gosselin, RGAL; and Victoria Donnelly, Arup

This session will highlight some of the successful actions taken by the project team to involve Indigenous Communities in the support of building understanding and social license for the projects. The case study examined would be the Alexandra Bridge Replacement Project in Ottawa/Gatineau. The panelists will discuss how Indigenous Communities were directly involved in key areas of project planning through participation in Field Studies, Community led Studies, and Interactive Community Engagements.

This inclusive approach contributed to the overall project design, identification and protection of key ecological and heritage features, and economic participation in the project. The common theme of Indigenous contributions will be woven into each area of discussion as a key component. Features of the work include use of the Guardians program in ecological studies, participation of the Anishinabe Odjibikan Indigenous Field School in archaeological investigations, as well as studies performed by Indigenous communities such as Traditional Knowledge Studies, Alternative Means Assessment, and Socio-Economic Studies. These efforts contributed Indigenous knowledge and perspectives to the project; and significantly to influence the Project Design. The panelists will discuss how the Indigenous Cultural Heritage Landscape could contribute to further development of an Interpretation and Commemoration Plan.

- Planning and Participation – key contributors: Rob MacDonald, Kevin Coulter,
- Indigenous-led Studies – key contributors: Victoria Donnelly, Rebecca Sciarra, Victoria Angel
- Interactive Community Engagement – key contributors: Ray Gosselin, Elise Croll

Session 7: Tools and lessons to manage risk and uncertainty

Decision-making confidence strengthened by clear management of impacts, whether through avoidance, mitigation, or follow-up.

Session Facilitator (tbc)

Bridging the Gap: Integrating Adaptive Management into Impact Assessment

Kassandra McKeown, Cambium Indigenous Professional Services; and Tanya Pulfer, Cambium Inc.

Impact assessment (IA) processes are often criticized for being technical, one-time process with limited space for local participation or adaptive over time. This presentation explores how integrating adaptive management into IA offers a powerful means to increase both the effectiveness of assessments and the meaningful participation of rights-holders and stakeholders. Adaptive management brings an iterative learning-focused approach that supports ongoing process of shared understanding and responsive action. A key example explored in this presentation is the Land Relationship Visioning (LRV) Tool – used in Indigenous led land use planning – and demonstrates how communities can co-create long term land stewardship and development visions rooted in cultural values and relationships to the land. The LRV shows how adaptive, participatory methods can reshape assessment practices to reflect local priorities and foster shared responsibility. By drawing lessons from the LRV we aim to outline how adaptive management can help reorient IA toward more just, accountable, and resilient processes.

Navigating Uncertainty in a Changing Regulatory Regime

Chris Powell, Stantec Consulting Ltd.

Navigating uncertainty in a changing regulatory regime is a critical challenge for impact assessment practitioners and those involved in the impact assessment process. This presentation will delve into the various types of uncertainty and explore different perspectives on how to address these uncertainties. The presentation will touch on key types of uncertainty, including process uncertainty, data uncertainty, predictive uncertainty, context uncertainty, and implementation uncertainty and how these inform decision-making. The presentation will incorporate diverse insights from proponents, consultants, Indigenous communities, etc. and discuss impacts to project timelines, identification of effective mitigation measures, and challenges to Indigenous communities as well as their rights and interests. Decisions regarding project investment, professional integrity, social capital, and regulatory approvals often hinge on the ability to identify and manage uncertainty. This presentation bridges diverse perspectives to acknowledge risk and uncertainty while promoting the need for clarity in the impact assessment process to support informed decision-making.

Duty to Consult in the Wake of Kebaowek First Nation v CNL and the Future of IAs

Mina Patel, WSP Canada.

In *Kebaowek First Nation v. Canadian Nuclear Laboratories (CNL)*, 2025 FC 319, the Federal Court determined that the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission (CNSC) had breached the Crown's constitutional obligations to Kebaowek. At the heart of the decision was the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, including the principle of Free, Prior, and Informed Consent (FPIC). CNL may appeal the decision. This presentation will, regardless of the outcome, discuss whether resource industries should move engagement activities towards consent. This presentation will explore how practitioners can assist Industry and Indigenous communities navigate the changing consultation landscape.

Session 8: Artificial intelligence enabled decision support tools (Interactive)

Artificial intelligence (AI) offers powerful opportunities with inherent limitations.

Session Facilitator: Greg Hayes, Dillon Consulting Limited

Reimagining EAs: AI-Driven Workflows for Smarter, Faster Decisions

Greg Hayes, Dillon Consulting Limited

As the need for major infrastructure projects increases, environmental assessments (EAs) are under pressure to become more efficient, predictive, and collaborative. Artificial intelligence (AI) offers powerful opportunities to reimagine the way we assess and communicate environmental impacts – but how do we make these tools actionable for real-world projects? In this interactive, scenario-based session, participants will explore how AI can enhance key stages of the EA process – from constraint mapping and routing to risk forecasting and stakeholder engagement. After a brief introduction and demonstration, attendees will split into facilitated groups to run through a realistic EA project scenario using AI-enabled decision support tools. Each team will explore different priorities, adjust parameters, and interpret AI-generated outputs to simulate real-life trade-offs and planning dynamics. Together, we will compare results and reflect on how AI can accelerate and enrich EA workflows, while identifying limitations and opportunities for future integration.

Closing Panel – Differing perspectives and complex tensions: Considerately furthering societal interests

The opening panel will be back to provide their impressions on how the 2025 OAIA Conference may have helped further societal interests when faced with different perspectives and complex tensions.

Panel participants:

- > Justina Ray, Wildlife Conservation Society Canada
- > Michael Fox, Indigenous Community & Engagement
- > Jon Pounder, Stantec Consulting Ltd.
- > Dr. Brian Budd, DPRA Canada

Panel facilitator: Anjala Puvananathan, Impact Assessment Agency of Canada